

An Antidote

by James Smith

We can reconcile ourselves to God's dispensations by being assured of our adoption, having an abiding sense of God's love, realizing God's presence, and having faith in God's Word.

Scripture: Proverbs 23:5, Isaiah 43:1, Romans 8:28, 2 Corinthians 1:20, 2 Corinthians 4:17, Philippians 3:10, 1 Peter 5:7, 1 John 4:16, Jude 1:21

Topics: "Divine Providence", "Faith And Trials"

Description

James Smith preaches on the challenging nature of divine providence, emphasizing that God's intention is to test our faith, patience, and submission to His will through trials. To reconcile our minds to God's dispensations, we must be assured of our adoption, have a constant sense of God's love, realize His presence, trust in His power working for our good, believe in His promises, value eternal things over temporal ones, remember our sinful nature and God's mercy, and seek fellowship with Christ in His sufferings.

Transcript

The dispensations of divine providence are confessedly trying--and they are intended to be trying! God intends to try our faith, our patience, and our submission to his will. At times we forget this, and then we misunderstand God's design, are ready to complain of his dealings, and conduct ourselves improperly in his sight. God will not change his plans to please our fancies, nor alter his decrees to gratify our feelings. Our wills are to be subordinated to his will, and our feelings should be ruled by his Word. Trials we must have; trials we shall have. God's ways will never be our ways--until our wills are entirely swayed by his will. Yet we may have peace. We may be happy. Let us therefore consider,

What is necessary to reconcile our minds to God's dispensations?

First, We must be assured of our adoption. If I realize that God is my father; if I know that I am his child; if I am persuaded that everything that takes place has been arranged by my Father's wisdom, is brought about by my Father's providence, and occurs under my Father's eye--then I shall be reconciled to whatever occurs. I shall say, "It is the Lord--let him do what he thinks best." God is my father, and he will not allow his child to be injured. This event, however painful, is part of my Father's plan. It is by his appointment. It is for his glory. It is, all things considered, the very best thing that can be! Then, my soul, be silent, be content, be satisfied.

Second, We must have an abiding sense of his love. He "loved me--and gave himself for me!" "We have known and believed the love that God has to us--God is love." Thus primitive Christians felt, and thus they wrote. It was with them a settled point, that they were the objects of God's love. They made their calling and their election sure. Just so should we. Never, for one day, should we be satisfied without knowing the love that God has to us. And knowing it, we should keep the eye of the mind fixed upon it.

The cross, as the expression and proof of God's love, should be constantly before us. In the Spirit, who sheds abroad the love of God in the heart, we should constantly walk. Communion with God, in which the love of God is realized and enjoyed, should be constantly maintained. If I believe that God loves me--that he has loved me with an everlasting love--that his love is infinite and eternal, so that he cannot love me more, nor will he ever love me less--then I can meet trials, bear troubles, and bow to changes--because God loves me just the same; I am reconciled to all his dispensations; I see every trial labeled, "From a God of love!" I say under my heaviest cross, "God loves me still, therefore will I not fear!"

Oh, let us seek, and seek until we obtain the assurance of God's love to us; and having obtained it, let us keep ourselves in the love of God, praying in the Holy Spirit, looking for the mercy of our "Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

Changes in providence do not indicate that there is any change in grace; God may vary his dealings--but he rests in his love.

Thirdly, A realization of God's presence. God is always with us. He never leaves us for one moment. He goes with us step by step through the whole journey, and he wishes us to live, speak, and act, as in his presence. But alas! too often we forget that God is with us. That God, in all the glory of his nature and perfections, is with us, and with us as our God! With us, to hear our cries, to supply our needs, and perform his precious promises. My soul, never forget, that God sees you. God loves you. God is with you. Realize his presence, and whom will you fear, at what will you be alarmed, what will cause you to complain? If God is my father, if God loves me, if God is with me--what can I not do? What can I not bear? What can I not suffer? What shall harm me? What should disconcert me?

O for grace to realize that God is with me in the darkest day, in the roughest path, in the longest night, in the heaviest trial, and in the severest conflict. For if God be with us--we shall be strong to bear, patient to endure, and certainly overcome. Yes, if God be with us--God will be for us; and "if God is for us--who can be against us?" But the Lord is with us, and we may boldly say, "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid, for the Lord, Jehovah, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation!" Harken, my soul--your God is speaking; he says, "Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior!" Isaiah 43:1-3

Fourth, A persuasion that his power is overruling all things for our good. That is so plainly stated in God's Word, that there can be no doubt about it. "All things"--the good and the evil, the bright and the dreary, the pleasant and the painful, the sweet and the bitter. God has set the one over against the other. The one counteracts, to a certain extent, the influence of the other. The past is prepared for the present, and the present is preparatory to the future. All that occurs is needful. The present is rendered necessary by the past, or it is to fit me for something just at hand.

My good, my welfare, my benefit is secured. Grace and glory are given me, and no good thing will the Lord withhold from me! If Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and if Benjamin must go--it is for our good; and as in Jacob's case, will procure us supplies, and enhance our happiness. Let us then freely give up whatever God sends for; and let us thankfully receive whatever God sends. All things are working for us, today. All things will conspire to do us the greatest possible good, at the last.

Let us, therefore, bow to the will of God, approve of the plans of God, and acquiesce in the providence of God. "Say you to the righteous, that it shall be well with him." "Surely it shall be well with those who fear the Lord." O my soul, seek meekness, seek righteousness, seek grace, and then in your greatest trial you will be able, in the confidence of faith, to look up to your heavenly Father and say:

"All things on earth, and all in heaven,

On your eternal will depend;

And all for greater good are given.

And all shall in your glory end.

Fifth, Faith in God's Word, especially his promises. The promises are at once the object--and the food of our faith. We are to believe them. To believe them as they are confirmed in Jesus. To believe them as made to us. To believe that God will fulfill them in our experience. The promises are so plain--that we cannot misunderstand them. They are so comprehensive--that nothing is left out of them. They contain provision for all our needs--and antidotes for all our fears. There is no one good thing that God could give us--that he has not promised to confer upon us. Nor is there one evil that could injure us--that he has not promised to ward off from us. "The Lord will give us that which is good." "No weapon formed against you shall prosper."

There are promises for every day, every hour, every minute of our lives. Every promise is true--and its fulfillment is certain. But God requires of us faith. We must believe what he has said, place confidence in his veracity, plead his promises at his throne, and expect him to make them good. If I believe that God will supply all my needs, that he will give me strength equal to my day, that he cares for me, that he will deliver me in six troubles, and in seven not allow any evil to touch me, and that he will make his strength perfect in my weakness--shall I not be satisfied with his dealings? or, at least, be reconciled to his dispensations?

Sixth, A correct estimate of the things of time. "The things that are seen are temporal--but the things that are not seen are eternal." The world passes away. The things of time are limited by time, and, therefore, ought not to affect us too much. Sickness and pain are but for a season. Bereavements are known only in this world. Gold and silver are of little value--on a death-bed; and no value at all to us--when we lie in our coffin. Man's opinion changes like the wind, and popularity or persecution are both evanescent. "Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle!" Proverbs 23:5

All that is of earth--is earthy. Have you sustained a loss, and would you estimate it at its true value? Lay it beside your coffin, and look at it there. Are you deeply grieved by any occurrence. Try to realize how it will appear fifty years hence. "What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world,

as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away. I would like you to be free from concern!" That is, free from anxiety. Living a life of calm and holy dependence on God. Living for eternity. Living for God. Living in the world--as those who must soon leave it. My soul, whatever appears important now, if it is limited by time, will soon change in its appearance, and look very different!

Seventh, A recollection of our origin and desert. We should never forget: what we were before God called us by his grace; what we might have been--but for his sovereign mercy; and what we certainly would be--if left wholly to ourselves. We were rebels against God's government, traitors to his cause, and doomed to an eternal hell. Everything short of hell--is mercy. If I had my deserts--I would be in hell today! I would be feeling its fierce flames, enduring its scorching torments, and horrified by its dreadful inhabitants! But I am rescued from it, and am going to heaven; shall I not therefore, bow to whatever God has appointed, acquiesce in whatever God wills, and be reconciled to all God's dealings with me; seeing he has saved me from such an awful doom, and is preparing me for such a glorious portion?

I was enmity against God by nature. I would be enmity against God this day--if it were not for his glorious grace. I deserve hell most justly, and would have been in hell--but for his kindness. Ought I not, therefore, to rise higher than merely being reconciled to the dispensations of his providence? and should I not be willing to do anything for him, suffer anything from him, and praise and bless his dear name--be my circumstances whatever they may?

"Look unto the rock whence you are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence you are dug." Look at the horrible pit from which he raised you, and the miry clay from which he extricated you. Look--and admire! Look--and for shame, cease complaining! Look--and love him! Look--and praise his thrice blessed and most glorious name!

Finally, Fellowship with Christ in his sufferings, as the Man of Sorrows. If we call our lot hard--what was the lot of Jesus? If we talk of our privations--what are they, compared with his? If we speak of our sufferings--let us compare them with the sufferings of Jesus.

Go to Bethlehem--and see the babe in a manger.

Go to the mountain top--and see the Son of God at his devotions, under the starry heavens, and on the cold, dewy ground.

Go to the streets of Jerusalem--and hear him say, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests--but the Son of Man has no where to lay his head."

Go to Gethsemane--and hear him groan, and see him sweat great drops of blood, while he offers up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears!

Go to Gabbatha--and see him stripped, buffeted, spit upon, smitten in the face, scourged, crowned with thorns, and condemned to die.

Go to Golgotha--and see him hanging on the accursed tree, witness his agonies, hear his bitter cry, "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me!" Behold him die. Was ever sorrow like unto his sorrow? Were ever sufferings like unto his sufferings? And all for you! All for your salvation!

My soul, in all your toils and trials, in all your griefs and woes, in all your sufferings and privations; seek fellowship with Jesus in his sufferings, for if anything will reconcile you to the dispensations of your

heavenly Father, or make you carry your cross with patience--it is this.

O my soul, do not expect a path strewed with flowers--when your Savior's was strewed with thorns!

Do not expect to escape the cross--or avoid being conformed to your suffering Lord!

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